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Speech of  
Hon. William B. Bate

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1898

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RECOGNITION OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF CUBA.

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SPEECH

OF

HON. WM. B. BATE,  
OF TENNESSEE,

IN THE

SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,

Saturday, April 16, 1898.

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WASHINGTON.  
1898.

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Mr. W. A. Smith

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S. S. 17 Feb, 12

SPEECH  
OF  
HON. WM. B. BATE.

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The Senate having under consideration the joint resolution (S. R. 149) for the recognition of the independence of the people of Cuba, demanding that the Government of Spain relinquish its authority and government in the Island of Cuba, and to withdraw its land and naval forces from Cuba and Cuban waters, and directing the President of the United States to use the land and naval forces of the United States to carry these resolutions into effect—

Mr. BATE said:

Mr. PRESIDENT: I suppose, according to the arrangement of last night when I was not here, time was allotted to me of fifteen minutes without any request of mine. It is proper, however, upon an occasion of this kind, so momentous, so fateful, that every Senator who desires should be heard in regard to it and let his position be known to his constituents and the country. I feel much interest, as do my constituents, in this measure, and I would not be candid were I not to say I approach it with a degree of embarrassment.

I have no hesitation, however, in giving my voice and my vote for the independence of Cuba, and I am glad that my colleague and I agree upon this. I believe, in doing so, that we not only do that which is right, but reflect the will of our constituents, whatever they may think upon the subject of peace. I believe that the independence of Cuba should be acknowledged according to the minority resolution presented by the Senator from Indiana [Mr. TURPIE], and it is to that that I propose to speak. Under all the circumstances, I approve of it, and expect to cast my vote for that report known as the minority report, and principally for the reason that it acknowledges the independence of Cuba, and does it promptly and without equivocation.

Mr. President, for years and years you and I and all of us have been hearing of the troubles in the Island of Cuba. It is a part of the current history of the times. There was a time when the United States was solicitous to take Cuba as a part of her Government. But it seems not to be so now. But it has, however, become the sentiment of this country that Cuba should be cared for by the United States.

Her wrongs, her grievances, perpetrated by Spanish rule, have become more or less personal. She has had a war period of many years. But an angry and ominous one has hung over her, filled with wrath, for the last three years. The Government of Spain has so long held Cuba by the throat that she thinks her grip can not be loosed, and resists with violence every effort in that direction, and especially so of any effort by the Cubans themselves.

Insurgents have sprung up and for the last three years held at bay Spanish power. I have no criticism upon them because they rebelled against the power of a tyrant.

Insurgents and rebels are synonymous terms, and they have my sympathies.

Mr. President, you may search history—sacred and profane, ancient and modern—and you will find that wherever the word “liberty” is found there are the words “rebel” and “insurgent” on the page in front of it. Rebels and insurgents are the forerunners of liberty, and history so writes it. I have no criticism to make upon the Cuban insurgents. They did the best they could under the circumstances. One of the best evidences of their patriotism consists in the fact that they fought those battles without money and held the territory without outside aid. They have sustained their cause and have governed the larger part of the beautiful Island of Cuba. Two of the states and three or four of the provinces are under the control of the insurgents and have been for three years.

But we are told in this Chamber that we can not recognize their independence before intervention for fear that when our forces go there General Gomez will take command of them and will govern the conduct of the war. Mr. President, that is not a patriotic idea. That is not the view for a man to take who wants to see Cuba free. It is not the view that Lafayette took when he brought his fortune and his men to America. He did not ask, “Shall I command?” or “Shall the French nation dictate the conduct of the war?” He asked no such question, but tendered his sword unconditional to Washington and took the part assigned him.

When, in the crowning act of our old Revolution, at Yorktown, the tricolor of France fluttered in front while Lafayette was with Washington in the rear of Cornwallis, neither D’Estaing nor Count De Grasse hesitated to cooperate with the American Army and report to an American general. No, Mr. President, should our troops go to Cuba there would be no friction as to commanders. That would soon be adjusted to perfect satisfaction. It is not one of those matters about which we need have apprehension.

The insurgents for the last three years maintained themselves. They have not had, in a strict sense, a government *de jure*, but it can not be questioned, in the face of the fact of the reports which have been made to us from official authorities, that there was and is a government *de facto*, one that we must recognize, and one which has been able to maintain its authority over the territory of that Government in defiance of the power of Spain, notwithstanding her 200,000 troops which were upon Cuban soil. The Cubans have held that territory until this day; they have defended it; they have kept up their little flag for three years in actual warfare against them. And why is it said they are not a power to treat with?

Why need we hesitate upon the ground that General Gomez may take charge of the troops that may be sent there? There is nothing in it other than mere suspicion, and I dismiss it.

History is not without precedents where, under similar circumstances, independence has been acknowledged and recognition given by the nations of the earth. I give a precedent in point from our own country.

Passing by the “Ostend manifesto,” which pointed to intervention in Cuba, it must not be forgotten when Maximilian was Emperor of Mexico, possessed of the capital and at the head of a

Government, Juarez was a fugitive in the mountains and his government as itinerant as that of Cuba at present. The United States maintained diplomatic relations with Juarez as far as was practicable with a government which, like that of Cuba at present, had neither local habitation nor abiding place.

This country did not stop to inquire where the capital was, nor what seaports were held by Juarez, nor whether his legislature was in session or otherwise, but, regarding Maximilian as a European potentate invading an American State, we gave our moral influence and were prepared to add physical force to the fugitive and peripatetic government of Juarez without drawing the fine distinctions of international law.

A great nation makes precedents and discovers principles suitable and applicable to its own conditions and necessities. The United States called into existence the Monroe doctrine, which, if not yet written in the books of international law, stands as unchangeable as the laws of the Medes and Persians.

This country, in the case of Maximilian, made Europe understand that no foreign prince shall ever sit permanently on an American throne, and the time has now come to further emphasize the fact that the despotism of a European State shall not continue on the Island of Cuba, almost in touch with our shores. The opportunity has offered to enforce this doctrine, and we should embrace it with promptness and vigor and let consequences take care of themselves.

This is an example, Mr. President, which is on all fours with the one now before us in the case of the insurgents of Cuba. But it is said that these Cuban insurgents and rebels are without ships and without forts. They needed no ships, and they could not use them if they had them, for the reason that the insurgent government has not been acknowledged by the world; but if their independence had been acknowledged by the United States or by other nations, Cuba could have provided herself with ships to carry her commerce and she could have had all the relations with the outer world necessary for an independent government.

Neither was it so in the South American republics. When Mr. Monroe recognized them they were without ships of war and had but little commerce, and yet, sir, in the name of liberty, President Monroe did acknowledge them; and if that means anything, it means recognition. The doctrine known as the Monroe doctrine, which, although I believe it is not known on the pages of books on international law, yet the Monroe doctrine is now known and recognized every where, and is as fixed and unchangeable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. The Senate so recognizes it.

Mr. President, the right to recognize the independence of a people struggling bravely for national existence appeals so strongly to the American people that the shadowy principles of international law will hardly counterbalance that sympathy which springs in the hearts of a people who won their independence despite the law of nations and the power of Great Britain. The wrongs against which the American colonies revolted were matters of political principle; those against which the Cubans have been in arms these many years have superadded to the same principles the horrors of a warfare hitherto unknown among civilized nations, involving the very existence of the people.

Recognition of independence is always a question of fact, the criterion suggested by publicists being whether the old govern-

ment had recognized the independence of the new. But no such principle is recognized by this country. Our independence preceded by eight years England's recognition. France in recognizing the United States disregarded the principles of noninterference, and the practice of European governments has for a century been that of interference.

The nations of Europe in 1792 interfered in French affairs and attempted to set up another government for the people of France. The principle of interference to stop the effusion of blood, or to put an end to anarchy, such as that which has existed in Cuba, was, in 1827, justified by England, France, and Russia, when these nations intervened between the Sultan of Turkey and his rebellious subjects, the people of Greece.

The Porte rejected the overtures of the nations, as Spain does those of the United States, and the great naval victory of Navarino became the precedent which it is to be hoped will follow in Havana Harbor. In 1823 France intervened between the Government of Spain and her rebellious subjects, and the army of France marched to Madrid. Again, in 1839, England intervened between the Government of Spain and her rebellious subjects, the Carlists. In 1825 Mr. Canning intervened between Spain and her rebellious colonies in South America, and "called the New World into existence to redress the balance of the old."

The late abortive attempt at intervention of the nations of Europe between Turkey and Armenia recognized the principle of intervention, but it is to be hoped that the fiasco will not be repeated in our intervention between Spain and the Cubans. History is replete with examples and precedents which justify our action and intervention in Cuba, but on no page of history is recorded a parallel act of perfidy and treachery to that which sunk the *Maine* in the harbor of Havana.

A crime so recent, a horror so appalling, requires of me no repetition of its circumstances. It stands without a precedent and, happily for humanity, without a parallel among nations. Too gross in its iniquity for arbitration, too infamous in its character to be canceled by money, our people approve the Administration in its silence as to indemnity. The mangled forms of American sailors, the shattered wreck of our American battle ship, the dishonor of our flag, admit neither arbitration nor indemnity, but demand of this country prompt recognition of independence for Cuba and immediate active intervention, if necessary, to secure it.

I fully comprehend the responsibility that rests on those who appeal to war. I am familiar with its suffering, its cost, its horrors, but I fully agree with that sentiment expressed so epigrammatically by the Senator from Wisconsin [Mr. MITCHELL] that, "There is something worse than war; something better than money." I add to it by saying that dishonor is worse than war and liberty better than money. Intervention in Cuba and independence for the Cubans may be a matter for debate and discussion, but the crime which sunk the *Maine* cries aloud for punishment—swift, sure, and severe. My vote for those resolutions is given more because of the crime against our flag, our battle ship, and our gallant sailors, than for any other cause.

However much I may desire to see Cuba free and independent by her own efforts, my indignation over the perfidy which deliberately selected the best place in the Havana Harbor to destroy an American ship, and perpetrated a crime without a parallel,



carries my judgment for certain, swift, and severe punishment. The ghastly sight "will not down at my bidding."

Go for a moment to the harbor of Havana and see the wreck of that vessel. You are Americans who are proud of your sailors and proud of the flag under which they were. Look there and see the misfortune that overcame them. I believe it was treachery. I do not charge the Spanish Government was a party to it, but I say they had placed those mines there. They knew that fact, and they should have given notice to any of the vessels of another friendly power coming within the purview of such a danger, just as a railroad engineer is required to blow his whistle at a crossing or as a flag is held up to indicate where there is a point of danger.

They knew the danger was there; they had placed the mines there for a purpose: they were silent as to their location, and the authorities certainly directed our battle ship *Maine* to be towed to that point and fastened to that buoy, without giving us notice that the danger was there. The captain of the *Maine* did not know the parts of the bay in which mines were located. He did not know they were there.

He did not have the least intimation that there was danger there; and I say that the death of those sailors of our country cries out in the face of all the civilized world for vengeance. I seek not vengeance; yet I say that under such circumstances we can not overlook what has occurred. No man who loves the flag of his country, no man who loves its honor, believes that that outrage can be wiped out by the payment of money. It is the trembling coward, the sordid huckster, who teaches such doctrine. Our people believe in maintaining the honor of this country, and they feel that this midnight assassination needs rebuke.

I have never thought since the sinking of that vessel that we could keep out of war. As I regard it, it is in itself a *casus belli*. In my judgment it was the duty of the United States Government to have promptly demanded satisfactory explanation, and, Mr. President, as so much has been said in this debate about Andrew Jackson in recognition of the independence of Texas, I venture to say that if he had been at the head of affairs, old Hickory, "by the eternal," would have let loose the dogs of war on Morro Castle in forty-eight hours after the destruction of the *Maine* and murder of our sailors, and perhaps would by this time have made peace with Spain with Cuba free.

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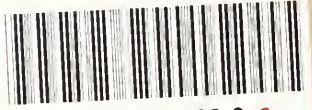
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